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President: Mr. Kavan ..... (Czech Republic)

The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Agenda item 28

Assistance in mine action

Report of the Secretary-General (A/57/430)

Mr. Mustafa (Sudan) (*spoke in Arabic*): It gives me pleasure, as we meet today to examine agenda item 28 regarding assistance in mine action, to express, on behalf of the Sudan, our deep gratitude and appreciation to the Secretary-General for his comprehensive report (A/57/430) on the subject and for his invaluable efforts in ensuring the implementation of the six strategic goals contained in the United Nations Mine Action Strategy for 2001-2005.

I would also like to thank, in particular, all assessment missions and field missions dispatched to mine-affected countries, as well as all international, regional and national agencies, organizations and programmes operating in this field.

Because it recognizes the great risks that mines pose, especially to civilians, the Sudan was one of the first countries to sign the Ottawa Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on their Destruction. As the Assembly is aware, my country is among those that face the risks related to mines; that is why we strongly support all international and regional efforts aimed at eliminating such risks.

In that context, we pay tribute to the efforts undertaken in this sphere since the entry into force of the Convention in March 1999 and the ensuing multilateral action, represented in the decisions and recommendations made at the Third Meeting of the States Parties to the Convention, held at Managua. Over the past three years, those efforts have led to a relative decrease in the production, stockpiling and use of landmines and supplement the United Nations effort to provide assistance in mine action. Here, cooperation has begun with two of our national agencies — the Humanitarian Assistance Agency and the Corps of Engineers — to build a national centre for mine action in the Sudan, where a database would be established and surveys undertaken to map out locations affected by mines in the Sudan.

In addition, many international and national organizations have participated in a European Union project to assist in mine action in the Sudan. That project has begun to train local personnel in the safe removal of landmines. Moreover, we appreciate the efforts of UNICEF, in coordination with national institutions, to raise the population's awareness of mine risks. A national mine network has been established to coordinate all mine-related efforts, including those of Government agencies — in particular our Humanitarian Assistance Agency, the Corps of Engineers, security organs and relevant ministries — and those of international organizations, especially the United Nations. Action is taken on three tracks: awareness-raising, victim assistance and mine removal. I cite all of these examples in order to outline my

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Government's commitment and its serious demining efforts, in coordination with international efforts.

The problem of landmines and ordnance remains a major obstacle to development projects and reconstruction in many countries, especially developing countries. The Sudan's experience in the Nuba mountains region has been promising thanks to the assistance of the United Nations and of the European Union, which has resulted in the return of civilians to their villages and in the resumption of grazing and agricultural activities. That gives us hope for the implementation of the United Nations mine-action strategy according to the established timetable and for the creation of an international environment free of landmines, especially in the light of the fact that there are 126 States parties to the Convention thus far. That fact underscores the wide acceptance of international standards and measures on anti-personnel mines.

We are certain that further progress can be achieved if the efforts of the United Nations and of the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining are coordinated with national and regional efforts, through partnerships with all concerned parties and relevant international organizations. We are counting on financing from the World Bank and from other international lending agencies to provide us with the resources necessary to ensure the implementation of the mine-action strategy of the United Nations.

In closing, I should like to emphasize my country's firm resolve to cooperate with United Nations assistance programmes to eliminate mines in the Sudan. From this rostrum, I call upon all Member States to assist mine-affected countries in developing our national programmes, in accordance with the Ottawa Convention on the prohibition of landmines, in particular because we all recognize that landmines and other explosive devices pose risks to human beings, in addition to hindering national development projects in many countries.

Mr. Flores (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): A year ago, in this forum, the delegation of Peru stated that there was no doubt about the existence of the political will to eradicate anti-personnel mines and that it could not be otherwise, because they are horrific weapons that claim innocent victims, especially children.

For that reason, we were surprised to observe, in discussions in the First Committee on the draft resolution on the implementation of the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction, that political circumstances are being brought forward to justify their use. For Peru, there is no possible justification for the use of anti-personnel mines in conflicts, because they are inherently evil and, in technical language, are classified as excessively cruel weapons with indiscriminate effects ,in the mutilation of innocent victims, especially children, even when the conflict that caused their placement has ended.

In that context, Peru welcomes the report of the Secretary-General on assistance in mine action (A/57/430). Especially important is the progress made in preparing a rapid response plan to meet demining needs in emergency situations and the inclusion of demining programmes in operations carried out under the mandate of the United Nations. Peru shares the opinion of the Secretary-General that organizations devoted to mine action should widen the scope of their activities, integrating them with humanitarian and development programmes.

A year ago, we reported the progress made by Peru in the total eradication of anti-personnel mines. For the Peruvian delegation, it is gratifying to have this new opportunity to share with the rest of the international community the progress made in 2002.

Peru is fulfilling the two sets of complementary activities on mines. On the one hand, we have taken the necessary action to avoid the use of mines in the future; on the other, we are dealing with the effects of mines that have already been placed. Peru has completed the destruction of the 321,368 anti-personnel mines that were held in the Peruvian arsenal. The process has enjoyed the support and verification of representatives of the international community, the United Nations, the Organization of American States, the International Committee of the Red Cross and civil society.

Similarly, we are coordinating with our police forces the demining of the 1,400 high-tension towers that required protection during the terrible period of terrorism in our country. Accordingly, in April 2002, Peru and the Organization of American States expanded the scope of the agreement on the Comprehensive Action against Antipersonnel Mines, signed in May 2001. That expansion will make it

possible to extend cooperation to demining activities on 350 high-tension electrical towers.

Likewise, a draft bill has been prepared for the creation of a Peruvian anti-personnel demining centre, which will develop the planning and operations necessary to fulfil governmental goals, based on obligations under the Ottawa Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-personnel Mines and on Their Destruction, as well as coordination with national units in charge of implementing the aforementioned mandates.

The eradication of anti-personnel mines is part of a more ambitious goal of Peru's foreign policy aimed at limiting arms expenditures in South America in order to devote greater funds to social investment. Within that policy, Peru is interested in transforming the region, the world's first nuclear-weapon-free zone, into its first zone free of anti-personnel mines. In the context of that effort, the foreign and defence ministers of the Andean Community — consisting of Peru, Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador and Venezuela — approved last June the Andean Charter for peace and security and the limitation and control of foreign defence spending, which, in chapter IX, entitled "Commitments to the eradication of anti-personnel landmines", reaffirms the commitment of all the Andean countries not to use, develop, produce, acquire, stockpile, conserve or transfer anti-personnel landmines, directly or indirectly, under any circumstance whatsoever.

Subsequently, in July 2002, all the presidents of the 12 South American countries approved the Declaration on the South American zone of peace and cooperation, which was duly welcomed by the General Assembly yesterday. The Declaration recognizes the gradual elimination, leading as soon as possible to the total eradication of anti-personnel mines. We hope that these and other efforts will allow us to achieve the shared objective of banning anti-personnel mines.

Mr. Khalid (Pakistan): For the last many years, our discussions on the consequences of the indiscriminate use of landmines have had mixed results. Ironically, the use of landmines have mostly harmed the civilian population in various parts of the world. Over 70 developing countries, including Afghanistan, Angola, Azerbaijan, Ethiopia, Burundi, Somalia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, are suffering because of the irresponsible use of landmines as a result of foreign occupation or internal conflicts. It is alarming to know that an estimated 110 million anti-personnel mines are currently deployed in 70 countries. The conflict areas in which these landmines have been implanted not only pose a danger to human and animal lives, but are also a major source of serious social and economic problems.

In Afghanistan, there are over 10 million landmines scattered all over the country, which is perhaps the largest mine-strewn land in the world. The miseries of the people of Afghanistan are further compounded by the remnants of unexploded ordnance following the war against Al Qaeda. We appreciate the efforts undertaken by the Mine Action Programme for Afghanistan, under the auspices of the United Nations. We hope that the United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS), which assumed the responsibility of clearing mines and unexploded ordnance in Afghanistan in June this year, will be able to discharge its duties in a diligent manner.

We are alarmed to see that mine and unexploded ordnance contamination has affected 31 out of the 32 provinces, in 1,585 villages in Afghanistan. The Mine Action Programme for Afghanistan has estimated that, at current levels of the Programme's funding, as many as 360 square kilometres of high-priority mined land can be cleared within the next seven years. We think that, with additional resources, this period can be further reduced and many precious lives saved. UNMAS estimates indicate that as many as 300 Afghans are killed every month in the mine-infested areas, while the number of those injured is much higher. Almost half of those injured have been treated in hospitals in Pakistan. Despite pressure on our medical facilities, we have been providing relief to Afghan mine victims.

We have taken careful note of the Secretary-General's report entitled "Assistance in mine action", contained in document A/57/430. We are glad that the Secretary-General has outlined the United Nations Mine Action Strategy for 2001-2005. In this regard, we support the Secretary-General's initiative to raise awareness on mine-action problems, to develop a rapid response plan and to build up the capacities of national Governments. We also hope that the Inter-Agency Coordination Group on Mine Action will chalk out a comprehensive plan of action, in coordination with various relevant agencies of the United Nations, in

addressing emergencies resulting from mines and unexploded ordnance.

We also appreciate the positive role played by the International Committee of the Red Cross and other non-governmental organizations in responding to mine-related emergencies. We would suggest that there should be greater interaction between the United Nations Mine Action Service and reputable non-governmental organizations involved in demining efforts.

Coming back to the Secretary-General's report, we are somewhat disappointed to see that UNMAS received only $28 million from donors between January 2001 and August 2002. Since these funds are made available through voluntary contributions, we urge the donor nations to bridge the gap that exists in the overwhelming majority of demining operations in various countries, especially Afghanistan, and the scarce resources available for the realization of these tasks. We are particularly concerned because Afghan refugees, taking shelter in Pakistan, have been unable to return to their homes due to the slow pace of demining operations. We hope that the United Nations and the international community will take due note of the precarious situation prevailing in Afghanistan and respond to this emergency on a priority basis.

Pakistan has actively contributed to the demining operations in several affected countries in the past. Our participation in the demining operations in Kuwait, Cambodia, Angola, Bosnia and the Western Sahara reflects our commitment.

Since 1997, Pakistan has declared a moratorium on the export of landmines. We have also ratified the Amended Protocol II to the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW) and have submitted information pursuant to Article XI (2) and Article XIII (4) of the Amended Protocol II. We remain ready to consider further measures and initiatives in the relevant multilateral forums to address the problem arising from the indiscriminate use of landmines.

The Secretary-General's report makes cursory mention of the mine action situation in South Asia. Pakistan has been obliged to take precautionary defensive measures in the face of massive Indian military deployment against our country since December of last year. We will de-escalate as soon as India starts the demining process. According to Human Rights Watch, several hundred Indian civilian and military casualties took place during the planting of landmines in the wake of the Indian military build-up along the international border and the Line of Control. This is an unfortunate and completely avoidable loss of life, caused by the irresponsible use of landmines.

Mr. President, allow me to state that Pakistan enjoys a unique record on clearing all minefields after the three wars in South Asia. There has never been a humanitarian situation caused by the use of these mines. We remain committed to ensuring that the mines in our military inventory will never become the cause of civilian casualties in Pakistan or anywhere else.

In the past decade, great strides have been made in understanding the horrific effects of landmines and in stigmatizing their use and production. It is time to take the remaining steps, in the relevant multilateral forums, for effective control of these landmines and unexploded ordnance.

Mr. Aboul Gheit (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): On the question of mines, Egypt speaks from experience — indeed, painful experience — that lasted more than half a century. During that time, Egypt lost approximately 8,000 of its nationals to landmines.

My country is one of the most seriously affected countries when it comes to mines. Several battles during the Second World War took place on our territory; they left behind 280,000 hectares of land that had to be demined. This is a serious obstacle to the development of the area, near the northern coastline, which could otherwise be exploited for agricultural and tourist purposes.

In order to face this grave challenge, in the year 1991 Egypt undertook an ambitious effort to clear the land of mines and unexploded ordnance. Egypt is still shouldering the main burden, both human and material, involved in implementing this project, despite the fact that foreign forces left those mines behind on Egyptian territory. Hence, Egypt's call to the countries that planted the mines to shoulder the cost of clearing them. This would enable the Egyptian people to use their own land for their own benefit.

Within the context of Egypt's efforts to face the problem of landmines and their impact, we have for the last three years cooperated with the United Nations Mining Unit in the field of landmines, which resulted in a mission being sent by the United Nations to Egypt in order to evaluate the problem during the period 9 to

23 February 2000. The United Nations then published a report dated 7 July 2000, which included a comprehensive review of the problem of mines in Egypt and practical proposals for dealing with this problem. Egypt will pursue its contacts with the United Nations Secretariat and other concerned countries to consider how to clear these mines on Egyptian territory. For its part, in the year 2000, Egypt established a high-level mechanism to organize the necessary national administrative and technical committee to deal with the problem of landmines and unexploded ordnance. The national committee is made up of representatives of the ministries and relevant agencies supervising the clearance of mines and other war remnants.

We have studied the Secretary-General's report on assistance in mine action. We have also taken note of the United Nations Mine Action Strategy for the year 2001-2005 referred to in the report. We have presented our remarks to the relevant unit in the Department of Peacekeeping Operations. Regrettably, the review and assessment that were supposed to be conducted on the Strategy have been postponed until next year. We wish that the United Nations unit had attached the remarks of Member States to the report which is before us today. Regrettably, this did not happen.

We have previously stated that the United Nations Mine Action Strategy for 2001-2005 is a departure from what was adopted regarding the Strategy in 1998. We have mentioned that this Strategy is characterized by shortcomings in dealing with the needs of the affected countries. Hence, our call for a review of the Strategy. We aspire to making this a reality next year. The remarks of the Member States should be taken into consideration in order to ensure that the Strategy is effective and efficient and attains its objectives.

In conclusion, regarding the Ottawa Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production, and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction, we wish to emphasize that Egypt agrees with the humanitarian objectives of the Convention, but many countries, including my own, have reservations on it. These reservations have been referred to at several international forums. Foremost among them is that the Convention ignores the responsibilities of the States that laid mines in the land of others and that have not taken any action to remove them. There is a lack of clarity and comprehensiveness in the Convention concerning the assistance necessary for this purpose. In addition to that is the fact that the Convention totally ignores the rights and responsibilities of States to secure their borders and to defend their own territories.

Egypt joins previous speakers who have expressed their concern regarding reports and information that some of the member States signatories to the Ottawa Convention have reverted to the use of anti-personnel mines. This reflects on the Convention's credibility and strengthens the call for its revision and for assessment of the methodology for dealing with the whole problem.

Mr. Kittikhoun (Lao People's Democratic Republic): At the outset, allow me to express my appreciation to the Secretary-General for the comprehensive and informative report (A/57/430) he has presented to us on assistance in mine action. The report not only focuses on the progress achieved in implementing the six strategic goals and related objectives outlined in the United Nations Mine Action Strategy for 2001-2005. It has also given us an overview of mine action undertaken in various countries of the world by United Nations programmes and other related agencies. Furthermore, the report also outlines lessons and experiences learned from the past and gives us guidance on how to tackle effectively the mine issue in the future.

The international community continues to be concerned about the question of mines and other unexploded ordnance (UXO) that are present as a result of protracted wars, regional conflicts and internal struggles. National Governments have made all the efforts they possibly could to resolve that problem. Yet, millions of landmines and other unexploded ordnance are still buried in the soil or are scattered on the surface in more than 60 countries around the world. Thousands of innocent people are killed or injured every day. Therefore, every effort should be made to intensify international cooperation in order to address that issue more effectively.

In February 2001, at the age of 41, Mr. Viengthong, the father of a family, struggling for survival in a remote village in Attapeu, a southern province of Laos, was cutting hillside grass with a long blade. Suddenly, he made contact with an anti-personnel cluster bomblet. The bomb exploded. He lost his left eye and was completely blinded in the other.

The blast also caused serious impairment to his hearing. In short, the rest of his life has been ruined as a result. This sad story is only one of the many tragic accidents that have occurred, which can again occur any day, at any time, anywhere in the 15 unexploded-ordnance-contaminated Lao provinces.

In fact, few countries in the history of warfare have experienced anything like what we did in Laos: the heaviest aerial bombardment of the Indo-China war, particularly between 1964 and 1973. During that period, more than 400,000 bombing missions were launched, dropping more than 2 million tons of bombs on our small, poor country. More than 25 years after the end of the war, unexploded ordnance contamination still affects 50 per cent of the country's total land mass. Unexploded ordnance continues to limit the physical safety, livelihood and food security of people in 25 per cent of all villages in the Lao People's Democratic Republic and constitutes a significant obstacle to broader socio-economic development.

In order to address this problem, the Government of the Lao People's Democratic Republic set up in 1996 the Lao National Unexploded Ordnance Programme (UXO-Lao), with the objectives of reducing the number of civilian casualties from unexploded ordnance and increasing the amount of land available for food production and other development activities. UXO-Lao activities are divided into four important components: community awareness, training and capacity-building, survey, and clearance. The programme is now fully operational in 15 of the UXO-contaminated provinces and has a total national work force of 1,156. Since its inception, UXO-Lao has cleared 26.7 square kilometres of land, including 873 hectares in 2001, and has educated some 800,000 people nationwide about the dangers of UXO.

The UXO-Lao trust fund, supported by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), continues to be the main channel for contributions to the work of UXO-Lao. Funding has been provided by UNDP, UNICEF, the European Union, and the Governments of Australia, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Japan, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Sweden, the United Kingdom and the United States. Some international implementing partners, such as Handicapped International, the Mine Advisory Group, Norwegian People's Aid, and so forth, also support the programme. In that regard, the Lao Government would like to express sincere gratitude to all donors for their generous assistance and support, which have rendered the UXO-Lao trust fund activities possible. It is our fervent hope that the international community will continue to lend its support and assistance to our efforts achieve the objectives set out in the programme.

It is sad to note that landmines and unexploded ordnance are still threatening the lives of people in many regions of the world. For many countries, in particular developing countries, landmines and unexploded ordnance constitute an obstacle to social and economic development. In order to ensure a peaceful and productive life for those now living with the threat of landmines, we believe that, through concerted global efforts and cooperation with the United Nations as a focal point for mine action, the huge tasks lying ahead can be accomplished.

Mr. Scott (Australia): In this difficult time, we continue to make considerable progress in strengthening international norms against anti-personnel landmines. Nevertheless, the battle is far from over. Indeed, there are constant reminders that much work remains ahead of us. The fact that this year's Landmine Monitor Report, published by The International Campaign to Ban Landmines, estimates that a further 15,000 to 20,000 landmine casualties occurred during 2001 — the same as in the previous year — is a clear reminder that we must redouble our efforts.

We can address this human tragedy only if we bring a halt to the use of all anti-personnel landmines through universal adherence to, and respect for, the Ottawa Convention and by allocating the necessary resources for mine clearance, mine awareness and victim assistance activities. Australia offers its full support to the Convention and encourages the broadest participation possible. My Government continues to work closely with other Member States to encourage wider adherence to the Convention. We value the opportunity to share experiences and approaches with those equally committed to universal adoption of the Convention. We urge any State that is facing difficulties in committing to, or meeting its obligations under, the Convention to discuss their concerns with other Members to identify the necessary support.

Australia supports the key principles, strategic goals and objectives of the United Nations Mine Action

Strategy for the period 2001-2005 by: providing core funds to the United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS) for its coordination role in mine action activities; by funding mine action interventions that help build national and local capacities to plan, coordinate and implement mine action programmes; by encouraging the use and development of the International Mine Action Standards; and by providing considerable resources for mine action globally.

Ms. Jarbussynova (Kazakhstan), Vice-President, took the Chair.

Development and stability in our region are key concerns for Australia. Through support of those Asian countries that are heavily mine-affected, Australia's mine action programme contributes to promoting a prosperous and stable future. Our efforts continue to focus on the Asia-Pacific region, specifically South-East Asia and the South Pacific. Over the past 12 months we have worked closely with the Governments of Canada, Thailand, Japan and New Zealand to build support for the Convention in South and South-East Asia and the South Pacific.

I would like to make particular reference to the initiative of Thailand in hosting a regional landmines conference for countries of the Association of South-East Asian Nations in May of this year. Australia, together with Canada and Japan, had the pleasure of co-sponsoring that event. The meeting was a particularly valuable opportunity for Government and non-government representatives to exchange views and ideas on how best to address the landmines problem in South-East Asia. It was also an opportunity to better understand the barriers to accession or ratification and served to underline the difficulties in making progress, which, at best, will be incremental. Australia warmly welcomes Thailand's offer to host the Fifth Meeting of States Parties to the Ottawa Convention. A meeting in South-East Asia will give much-needed impetus to efforts to build support for the Convention in that heavily mine-affected region.

The Australian Government continues its firm commitment to mine action and over the past 12 months has committed more than 12 million Australian dollars to a range of humanitarian mine action programmes. With 73 million Australian dollars expended since January 1996, the Australian Government is well advanced in meeting its undertaking to provide some 100 million Australian dollars on mine action activities for the decade to December 2005. Once again, the main recipients of Australia's mine action funding are Sri Lanka, Cambodia and Laos. Reinforcing that focus on South-East Asia, we are pleased that we will shortly commence funding a three-year mine clearance project in partnership with the Government of Viet Nam.

In recognition of the significant mine and unexploded ordnance problem faced by Afghanistan, Australia has contributed a total of 3 million Australian dollars to mine clearance activities in that country. In this context, Australia is encouraged by the recent undertaking by the new Government in Afghanistan to accede to the Ottawa Convention. This is a significant move and — we would hope — a move that will encourage others who continue to insist on the necessity of anti-personnel landmines to seriously reconsider their position with regard to the Ottawa Convention.

Equally, and in conclusion, we acknowledge and welcome the announcements made by Sri Lanka and the world's newest State, Timor-Leste, that they will move quickly towards accession to the Convention.

The Russian Federation attaches great importance to the whole range of problems relating to mine action. We are grateful to the United Nations Secretary-General for his report, which reflects key milestones in implementing the United Nations Mine Action Strategy. We support efforts made under the aegis of the United Nations to mobilize the international community to eliminate the consequences posed by the danger of mines.

Russia knows from bitter experience about the tragedy, the suffering caused by the uncontrolled use of mines. Despite the fact that more than half a century has elapsed since the end of the Second World War, each year the Ministry of Defence and the Ministry of Emergency Situations of Russia neutralize tens of thousands of pieces of ordinance. Unfortunately, today we are also confronting more modern manifestations of the dangers of mines. Russian soldiers are falling victim to mines planted by terrorists in the territory of the Chechen Republic. Our peacekeepers, in carrying out the crucial job of maintaining peace in the Georgia-Abkhaz conflict, are at the same time demining in the area of their responsibility. Nevertheless, more than ten people were killed or injured as a result of exploding mines in that area.

The report of the Secretary-General goes into detail about steps being taken under the aegis of the United Nations in mine clearance operations in various parts of the world. Russia supports the inclusion in the mandates of United Nations peacekeeping operations, where this is necessary, of provisions in support of demining. For our part, we are prepared to do whatever we can to support these activities.

I wish to inform you that in 2001-2002 Russia participated in a number of humanitarian demining projects. Under contract with the United Nations Mine Action Service in Kosovo, a territory of about 240,000 meters was demined. During the rebuilding of the Salang tunnel in Afghanistan, more than 4,000 mines and explosives were removed and rendered harmless. Together with our Spanish colleagues, a project is under way to train Afghan field engineers, and in fact 75 people have already been trained. Further, a project to demine a section of the Syrian-Turkish border is now being developed. We are prepared to play a practical role in demining operations under the Action Plan for Africa that was endorsed at the G8 Summit in Kananaskis.

The activities I have described are being carried out, inter alia, on the basis of a decree adopted by the Russian Government dealing with measures to ensure participation by the Russian Federation in international humanitarian demining programmes, operations and projects which regulate questions relating to the provision of assistance to other States in the area of mine action.

We support the conclusions contained in the Secretary-General's report regarding the need to elaborate national strategies to deal with the problem of mines. Russia's participation in mine clearance activities clearly attests to our commitment to international obligations in the area of dealing with anti-personnel mines, as well as our readiness to help overcome the negative consequences of regional crises.

The Russian Federation believes that banning the production, use, stockpiling and transfer of anti-personnel mines should be the ultimate goal of the international community. Here we advocate the gradual pursuit of this goal through a number of stages by ensuring the largest possible participation of States in Amended Protocol II, prohibiting or restricting the use of mines, booby-traps and other devices, of the 1980 Convention on certain conventional weapons. The basis of this document is a carefully honed balance which reflects the security and self-defence interests of States. We attach great importance to the holding in Geneva in December of this year of a meeting of the State Parties to this Protocol.

At the same time we think it is important to continue to work together with States Parties to the Ottawa Convention and we deem important joint projects in the area of humanitarian demining which provide good opportunities for this.

In conclusion, I would like to stress our readiness to continue our cooperation with the United Nations and its various structures in mine action activities, both in peacekeeping operations and during post-conflict rehabilitation of States.

Mr. Kulyk (Ukraine): The issue of mine action has been on the agenda of the General Assembly since 1993. Since the Ottawa Convention entered into force in March 1999, the use, stockpiling, production and transfer of anti-personnel landmines have dramatically been reduced. Notwithstanding these remarkable achievements, landmines continue to be deployed each year at greater risk to local populations. This adds to the large number of mines and other unexploded ordnance left as a result of armed conflicts and thus underscores the urgent need for a significant increase in mine clearing efforts by the international community in order to eliminate existing threats.

In this regard, it is absolutely necessary to convince all parties to halt new deployments of anti-personnel mines in order to ensure the effectiveness and efficiency of mine clearance operations.

While progress has been made in the ratification process of the Ottawa Convention, its universalization remains a serious challenge. More and more countries, including Ukraine, are now facing the need to implement in full the relevant obligations. Accordingly, while advocacy to stigmatize the use of landmines continues, efforts now should also concentrate on greater support to countries for the implementation of their specific treaty obligations.

Ukraine considers mine action to be an important component of United Nations humanitarian activities. Landmines are first and foremost a humanitarian concern and must be addressed from this perspective. In this regard, we are encouraged by the work that has been done over the past year by the United Nations

Development Programme and the United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS), as well as a number of non-governmental organizations. We would like to emphasize the role of UNMAS as the focal point for mine action within the United Nations system. We recognize the progress made over the last 12 months in this field, particularly in terms of strategic planning, operational support and information management. Public and political awareness of landmines problems have become widespread. The development of new standards and mechanisms has strengthened international confidence in the integrity and value of mine action. It is important that advocacy against the use of anti-personnel landmines remains a priority goal.

Encouraging progress has been achieved in the implementation of almost all six strategic goals and related objectives outlined in the United Nations Mine Action Strategy for the period 2001-2005, submitted by the Secretary-General in October 2001, namely in the following areas: interagency assessment missions to the mine-affected countries and production of information related to mine action problems; finalization of a rapid response plan to meet mine action requirements in emergencies and the conduct of mine action programmes in United Nations mandated operations; further development and application of international mine action standards; and continued advocacy and support for the universalization and implementation of the main international Convention on the subject.

The United Nations Mine Action Strategy has become a useful instrument, and it should be further optimized by taking into consideration the impact of the landmine problem on the development of States.

The first year of its implementation has also demonstrated the need for a more systematic approach and for the definition of clear objectives in the overall spectrum of mine action activities. The development of the International Mine Action Standards is a step forward towards safe and effective demining. We hope that these standards will be officially circulated among the Member States and translated into many languages, and that they will be accepted as the main instrument for conducting mine action activities. We also see merit in conducting, during the coming year, a review of certain specific standards that are deemed too onerous.

While important progress has been made in mine action during the past five years, the number of countries and areas that require and request assistance also continues to increase. The need to obtain adequate resources remains a constant challenge for the United Nations. Therefore, the sustained commitment of all those involved in the relevant international efforts is required. The timely mobilization of resources from donors is essential to the success of mine action programmes.

We note with appreciation the fact that last year the technical, material and financial resources needed to meet the costs associated with mine clearance activities became more available, but the overall shortfall in funding remains a concern.

Since the vast majority of humanitarian mine action activities are funded from voluntary contributions, an effective and well-coordinated funding strategy between the United Nations and the donor community remains of crucial importance.

Ukraine deeply appreciates the commitment and the generosity demonstrated by many States Members of the United Nations, as well as by numerous organizations inside and outside of the United Nations system, to assist it with the implementation of its Ottawa Convention obligations.

Ukraine has extensive experience in modern demining technologies, and its advanced logistics base allows for the training of highly skilled specialists within a short period of time. Ukrainian mine clearance engineers are widely recognized in various regions of the world, including the former Yugoslavia, Angola, Sierra Leone and Lebanon. The Ukrainian units operate under United Nations standards and operational procedures, and we are ready to provide technical support to, and share our experience with, the United Nations missions in various countries.

With respect to the issue of mine clearance, Ukraine would like to draw the attention of the Assembly to another important aspect of the problem: unexploded ordnance and remnants of war. Ukraine, like many States in the region, is affected to a considerable extent by the presence in its soil of unexploded remnants of past wars. According to statistics, in the past five years our mine cleaners have neutralized over 50,000 explosive devices in the territory of Ukraine. We have invited United Nations

Mine Action Service specialists to carry out an independent assessment of the scale of this problem.

We have also started preparatory work aimed at establishing a national mine action centre. In this regard, we call for the continuation of the efforts of the United Nations to foster the establishment of mine action capacities in countries in which unexploded ordnance constitutes a serious threat to the safety, health and lives of the local population.

Tremendous humanitarian development problems caused by the presence of mines and other unexploded ordnance continue to constitute an obstacle to the development of many States and have serious and long-lasting social and economic consequences, most of all for the peoples of the mine-affected countries. We believe that the issue of mine clearance should remain a priority in the global anti-mine action campaign.

Mr. Moesby (Denmark): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union. The Central and Eastern European countries associated with the European Union — Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia — and the associated countries Cyprus and Malta, as well as the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) country of the European Economic Area — Iceland — align themselves with this statement.

Allow me to begin by paying tribute to all those involved in combating anti-personnel landmines and unexploded ordnance around the world. Allow me in particular to commend the relentless efforts by the affected communities themselves; the Standing Committees and States parties to the Ottawa Convention; the United Nations Mine Action Service and all relevant United Nations agencies; the Mine Action Support Group; the International Campaign to Ban Landmines and its many affiliated non-governmental organizations (NGOs); the International Committee of the Red Cross; the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining; and all other institutions and organizations united in their common cause to decrease human suffering and increase human security.

Anti-personnel landmines and unexploded ordnance continue to inflict death and injury all over the world. There are an estimated 15,000 to 20,000 mine casualties every year, and most often innocent civilians are the victims. We must not forget that assistance in mine action, before anything else, is about saving lives and reducing human suffering. Each step should contribute to fulfilling this aim. But landmines and unexploded ordnance also have serious secondary social and economic consequences. The mutilation of victims places a heavy burden on countries already struggling to make ends meet. In post-conflict societies, landmines and unexploded ordnance impede economic recovery and development by preventing people from returning to their homes and working their land.

Responsibility for addressing the problem of landmines and unexploded ordnance rests with the authorities of mine-affected countries. But acquiring the necessary institutional means to deal effectively with the problem sometimes poses a formidable challenge. When national resources are lacking, the suffering caused by anti-personnel landmines and unexploded ordnance needs to be addressed within a humanitarian and development framework. The United Nations can play an important role in both.

Allow me in this context to commend the Secretary-General's report on assistance in mine action. The report constitutes an important element of a more systematic and coordinated approach to international assistance in mine action. The European Union and its partners welcome the progress described in the report and support the measures undertaken by the Secretary-General to optimize the United Nations Mine Action Strategy for 2001-2005.

We deem particularly praiseworthy the readiness by the United Nations immediately to implement suggestions by Member States regarding cooperation and coordination; integration and prioritization; scope of mine action; political commitment; and information sharing.

Important progress has been reported regarding the six strategic goals of the Mine Action Strategy. This progress includes improvements in information management; finalization of a rapid-response plan; development of national mine action plans; implementation of surveys; and steps towards improved institutional coordination and integration of mine action into overall assistance and development schemes.

Such measures are all very encouraging and clearly demonstrate that assistance in mine action is moving in the right direction. Particularly encouraging

are the steps towards greater national ownership, sustainability and overall integration of mine-action programmes into wider relief, rehabilitation, reconstruction and development efforts. The formulation of national mine-action strategies, and the integration of these into national relief and reconstruction plans, are wholeheartedly encouraged.

However, as stated by the Secretary-General in his conclusions, more needs to be done. Placing humanitarian mine action within the mainstream of humanitarian and development assistance requires further integration at all levels. For its part, the European Union will promote such measures through its support to socio-economic impact studies and landmine impact surveys and through its partnerships with affected communities and Governments and humanitarian and development actors.

Long-term development objectives and a firm political commitment by national authorities are crucial to the success of assistance in mine action. Mine-action programmes will eventually reach a stage at which the most acute threat to populations and economies has been countered or contained, whether through risk education, clearance or marking. At that stage, mine action will gradually develop into a more rehabilitation- and development-oriented activity. This has important implications for issues of prioritization, national ownership and funding. It is important that national mine-action strategies be set up with a view to ensuring effective decision-making about short-, medium- and long-term priorities. National and international support for mine action must be sustainable and must encourage and support national initiatives and institutions. The need to devote greater attention to transition strategies, as recommended by the Secretary-General, is highly relevant if the lasting and constructive impact of mine action is to be promoted.

The needs of the mine-affected community must set the basic parameters for assistance in mine action. The allure of operational mine clearance should not deflect attention from other, equally relevant, aspects of mine action: advocacy; mine-risk education; victim assistance; mapping, surveying and marking; and stockpile destruction. The shift of emphasis in the methodology of landmine impact surveys, described in the Secretary-General's report, from square metres and statistics to real-life socio-economic impact, is highly desirable. Placing landmines and unexploded ordnance in their proper social context makes assistance in mine action more sensitive to the requirements of affected communities.

The European Union and its associated partners believe that anti-personnel landmines and unexploded ordnance need to be dealt with locally and globally — locally, through community-based and national efforts; and globally, through the Ottawa Convention, through the United Nations system and through international cooperation and coordination. Allow me in this context to commend the chairmanship of the Mine Action Support Group for its efforts in coordinating donor support. The European Union will devote itself to furthering international coordination and cooperation on mine action and to forging partnerships with all relevant institutions and actors, not least those in mine-affected countries.

The European Union will continue its firm support for the universal and speedy implementation of the Ottawa Convention and the work relating to Protocol II of the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW). It is a testimony to the success and momentum of the Ottawa Convention that 130 States have acceded to the treaty. The public advocacy strategy envisaged in the Secretary-General's report should support this process and build on existing networks, with a view to strengthening cooperation with actors already engaged in advocacy and universalization.

The European Union will work for greater collaboration and coherence in international assistance to mine action. By pledging a total of 240 million euros in support of mine action for the period 2002-2009, the European Union has become one of the world's leading donors in this sector. Bilateral assistance from individual EU member States further emphasizes the prominent role played by the European Union in international assistance to mine action.

That important commitment was underpinned by the adoption in July 2001 of two European Community (EC) regulations on action against anti-personnel landmines. The regulations provide for an integrated and focused EC strategy for assistance in mine action, in addition to a multi-annual programming plan for 2002-2004, which is currently being finalized. The EC strategy is written in response to the Ottawa Convention and is closely related to the United Nations mine-action strategy for 2001-2005. The EC strategy

states as one of its key principles that EC support to humanitarian mine action must further the objectives of the international community and promote the effectiveness and efficiency of international assistance in mine action. Assistance through the common EC budget will therefore seek to complement and reinforce measures already undertaken by the international community — by supporting activities which enhance coordination, management, efficiency and effectiveness.

The European Union and its partners firmly believe that international law and assistance in mine action will help mitigate the disastrous humanitarian, social and economic consequences of anti-personnel landmines and unexploded ordnance throughout the world. The European Union and its partners therefore urge all Member States to join the international mine-action community in a sustained and global effort to curtail the suffering caused by these indiscriminate weapons. Step by step, mine by mine, assistance in mine action — based on partnership and dialogue — will bring us closer to that objective.

Mr. Rivas (Colombia) (*spoke in Spanish*): I should like first of all to thank the Secretary-General for his report (A/57/430) on this item, which describes the progress made in consolidating the strategic goals and related objectives outlined in the United Nations Mine Action Strategy for 2001-2005.

"During the course of this meeting today, at least two Colombians will become victims of anti-personnel landmines in our territory." Those were the heart-rending words of Mr. Francisco Santos, Vice-President of the Republic of Colombia, speaking at a recent international forum in Bogota on challenges posed by anti-personnel mines in my country. And it is those words that I would like to recall in speaking to the Assembly this morning as we undertake an overall assessment of the current threat that anti-personnel landmines continue to pose in Colombia, as well as an overview of the actions taken by my Government in fighting this serious problem.

It is impossible to come up with a precise figure for the number of anti-personnel landmines currently in Colombian territory. Approximate figures based on studies undertaken in recent years, however, suggest that there are about 100,000 such mines, most of which are concentrated in four departments of our country — areas where the Colombian Government has exerted major efforts during the past five years in an endeavour to permanently and definitively eradicate these cruel artefacts, sadly referred to as "hidden sentinels" and "enemies who do not sleep". Its aim is also to create, in a parallel way, a culture of prevention with regard to future anti-personnel mine accidents, as well as a comprehensive rehabilitation strategy for mine victims with respect to their role in society.

On 6 September 2001, in the framework of the Millennium Summit, Colombia demonstrated its firm commitment to the eradication of anti-personnel mines by depositing its instrument of ratification of the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-personnel Mines and on Their Destruction — commonly known as the Ottawa Convention — thus becoming the 103rd State Party to that instrument. However, the initiatives undertaken to prevent and eradicate their use in Colombia date back several years. In 1996, the Colombian military industry (INDUMIL) definitively suspended the manufacture of anti-personnel mines and proceeded to dismantle and destroy their production facilities.

Since we became a State party to the Ottawa Convention, our commitment has been demonstrated through equally tangible results. In conformity with that important Convention, we created, in January this year, the National Authority for Mine Action, an inter-institutional committee at the highest level, headed by the Vice-President of the Republic and composed of various State and non-State entities that enriched with their views and their experiences the planning of strategies to completely eliminate mines in Colombia. Likewise, Colombia has participated actively and consistently in the four Meetings of States Parties that have taken place since 1999, held at Maputo, Mozambique; at Managua, Nicaragua; and at Geneva, Switzerland. I should add that, since last year, my country has been submitting the annual report required under article 7 of the Ottawa Convention, summarizing actions undertaken within the framework of that international instrument.

None of those things would have been possible without the invaluable support and cooperation of the international community throughout the process. Two countries in particular — Switzerland and Canada — stand out among the nations that truly worked in partnership with the Government of Colombia during the implementation of the Ottawa Convention, through

their constant and committed assistance, through the sharing of experience with regard to creating the National Authority and through the technical cooperation of experts on anti-personnel mine action. Also worthy of mention is the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining, which bases its work on the contributions of various industrialized countries and of international organizations, such as the United Nations, and is currently the leading authority and the focus of every world initiative on the subject. The United Nations has generously offered its assistance to find a solution to this problem through possible future visits by the United Nations Mine Action Service. My country welcomes the Organization's willingness in that regard, and the inhabitants of the affected areas will especially appreciate any assistance that we may receive.

However, much remains to be done. Lawless armed groups continue to plant anti-personnel mines indiscriminately in Colombian territory. The sad, long-term effects of only one of those artefacts — or of the mere suspicion of their presence — on an entire population are well known. Not only do anti-personnel mines profoundly affect the physical and psychological integrity of entire populations, but their negative impact has the most serious collateral effects, such as the unusability of farmable land and the destruction of natural resources and of goods and services, among many other things. In addition, the rehabilitation of victims implies higher costs for the State and irreparably damages the relationships of victims with their families and with society. That has results so profound that they affect a multitude of people besides those who suffered the direct consequences of the accident.

In the first nine months of this year, 459 people fell victim to anti-personnel mines in Colombia — that is, two victims per day, as I noted at the beginning of my statement, echoing the words of the Vice-President of the Republic. Sadly, 50 per cent of the civilian victims tend to be children, some of whom endure amputation of one of their limbs, but many of whom lose their lives instantly or after painful agony.

Addressing this item on the agenda constitutes a space for reflection and a platform for finding joint solutions to a problem of such magnitude. The effort to totally eliminate anti-personnel mines has facilitated an important rapprochement among the various sectors of the State and of civil society. But such efforts require additional support that the international community and international organizations such as the United Nations are capable of providing. Colombia will highly appreciate any initiative of the Organization in that regard. Only thus will we be able to look to the future on the basis of the very objective that is our common denominator: a world free of anti-personnel mines.

Mr. Assaf (Lebanon) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I am pleased to express our thanks and appreciation to the Secretary-General for the report submitted under this agenda item concerning assistance in mine action (A/57/430). That report emphasizes the continued global commitment to achieving progress with regard to mine action and highlights objectives, progress made and imminent challenges.

Landmines are a global humanitarian problem whose solution requires the coordination of international action at the levels of Government and civil society. Mines are assassins in hiding to which victims come. They are patient murderers that lie in wait for their victims even decades after the end of wars and conflicts, threatening the lives of innocent civilians and hindering economic and social development.

The global scourge of anti-personnel mines can be illustrated through statistics. The total number of mines is estimated in the hundreds of millions, and they are scattered over 90 States — that is, nearly half of all Member States — and each year claim some 15,000 victims, the overwhelming majority of whom are civilians. In the face of that challenge, the United Nations has adopted a set of measures aimed at eliminating the scourge of mines. It has provided technical and financial assistance, established the United Nations Mine Action Service and an Internet web site, and adopted a Mine Action Strategy of six objectives.

In that context, the item on assistance in mine action was included on the agenda of the fifty-third session of the General Assembly of 1993. Since then, the General Assembly has adopted all of its resolutions on this agenda item by consensus. We can thus say that the countdown to the elimination of landmines has, indeed, begun. But further efforts are needed to achieve the other goals.

Lebanon is one of the 90 States affected by landmines. The Israeli occupation of southern Lebanon left a large number of landmines, estimated by the

United Nations to be 450,000, scattered over an area of 472 square kilometres — that is to say, about 5 per cent of the territory of Lebanon. Between May 2000 and the first half of 2002 those landmines claimed 35 lives and resulted in the injury of 192 other people, most of them civilians, including a large number of children. In addition to the human loss, these landmines prevent a sector of the local population from returning to their land, impede the work of the United Nations Interim Force in Southern Lebanon (UNIFIL) and obstruct the Government's development efforts. These mines also prevent the agricultural and industrial development of these tracts of land. The Secretary-General spoke about this problem in his most recent report to the Security Council on UNIFIL and described it as "a matter of utmost concern." (*S/2002/746, para. 16*)

Faced with this serious problem, the Government of Lebanon has moved to find appropriate solutions. It adopted a set of measures that, on the whole, were in line with the six strategic goals outlined in the United Nations Mine Action Strategy for 2001-2005 and set out in last year's report of the Secretary-General (A/56/448/Add.1). In brief, the most important of these measures are the following. First, in line with the strategic goal of putting in place national and local capacities to plan and coordinate mine-action programmes, Lebanon has established a National Office to Combat Landmines, whose staff includes a number of specialized officers from the Lebanese army. The National Office is playing a pioneering role in coordinating mine-action efforts by the Lebanese Government, the United Nations, the international community and non-governmental organizations.

Secondly, towards reaching the strategic goal of putting in place a rapid response capability to meet mine-action requirements in emergency situations, the United Nations and a number of individual countries responded to Lebanon's request for assistance in mine clearance and provided technical, material and financial assistance. Those countries and entities include the United States, the European Union, France, the United Kingdom, Saudi Arabia and Ukraine. In this regard, special mention must be made of the United Arab Emirates, which donated $50 million.

Early this year, an anti-landmine coordination centre for southern Lebanon was established with the participation of Lebanon, the United Nations and the United Arab Emirates. It manages and coordinates all mine-action activities. Two private companies have been contracted: Bactec International and Minetech International, which currently employ some 400 demining specialists in southern Lebanon. By the end of October, some 2.4 million square metres of land had been cleared and 17,793 anti-personnel landmines had been removed. However, it is not expected that those two private companies will finish their demining activities in southern Lebanon for several years, especially with the discovery of additional minefields. In that regard, Lebanon reiterates its demand that Israel hand over all maps and documents relating to landmines, in implementation of the relevant Security Council resolutions, including the most recent, Council resolution 1428 (2002).

Thirdly, in line with the strategic goal of making information available to all, the National Office to Combat Landmines, in cooperation with a number of non-governmental organizations in Lebanon, is offering counselling services and awareness-raising lessons on landmines for 150 schools in southern Lebanon, with a total of some 50,000 students.

In conclusion, Lebanon, which appreciates the solidarity of the international community regarding its landmine problem, reaffirms its cooperation with the international community to eliminate this scourge. We express our thanks to all mine-action actors, such as the United Nations, its specialized agencies, States and non-governmental organizations, which are all working hard to create a clean environment and a world free of landmines.

Mr. Kasemsarn (Thailand): Thailand welcomes the finding of the Landmine Monitor Report 2002 that the number of casualties from anti-personnel mines continues to decrease each year. Nevertheless, we are concerned that the number of victims of anti-personnel mines still remains high. Anti-personnel mines continue to pose a significant threat to human security. They do not discriminate between combatants and civilians, and randomly maim or kill innocent civilians, including women and children.

But the human costs do not represent the full picture of the landmine problem. Mines have also taken a heavy toll on wildlife and endangered species. The presence of landmines deters tourism and inhibits closer people-to-people contacts in certain areas. It poses an obstacle to infrastructure development, such as the construction of roads and railways. In sum, landmines impede a country's capacity to pursue

sustainable development. Scarce resources which could be used to promote further economic development have to be channelled to support important mine-action activities, such as mine clearance and victim rehabilitation. The establishment of a mine-free world and the universalization of the Ottawa process as one of the primary means to totally eliminate anti-personnel mines are thus an important and worthy undertaking for the international community.

That is why Thailand welcomed the adoption last year of the United Nations Mine Action Strategy for 2001-2005. In that regard, we appreciate the Secretary-General's report (A/57/430) on assistance in mine action, which reviews the first year of implementation of the six strategic goals and related objectives outlined in the United Nations Mine Action Strategy for 2001-2005. In view of the large number of organizations and agencies dealing with the various aspects of the landmine problem, Thailand supports the emphasis placed on the coordinating role of the United Nations in the fight against landmines and the call for effective partnerships. We note with concern the conclusion in the Secretary-General's report that the planned transition of mine action activities to national responsibility has in some cases been hampered by the inability of donors to continue funding programmes after such transfer. Discontinuation of such funding should not take place.

The challenge posed by anti-personnel mines to humanity is far too great for any one country to face alone. For affected developing countries in particular, international assistance and cooperation remain a vital component of their respective national strategies for dealing with the mine issue in all its aspects. This high-level political commitment to international assistance for affected developing countries was reaffirmed at the Fourth Meeting of States Parties to the Ottawa Convention, held in Geneva in September 2002. Despite its limited resources, Thailand has been at the forefront of efforts to tackle the landmine issue at the national, regional and global levels. But we readily admit that we would not have achieved many of our objectives were it not for the assistance and cooperation we have received from a variety of partners, including international organizations and non-governmental organizations.

At the national level, Thailand has destroyed a further 120,000 mines in its stockpiles, while work is progressing steadily in clearing mines in the field. A third humanitarian mine action unit to be based in the province of Surin in the north-eastern part of Thailand has been established, with the assistance of the United States, to undertake mine victim assistance and mine risk education activities. We are in the process of transferring some of the mine action expertise and experience from the military to civilian components. To enhance coordination of mine action activities nationwide, the National Mine Action Committee was revived. The United Nations Mine Action Service has helped promote greater awareness of the International Mine Action Standard (IMAS) in Thailand, and we are in the process of studying IMAS carefully. Thailand is particularly grateful to Canada for providing assistance in the form of mine detectors and to Japan for providing funds through the United Nations Development Programme to support the project on facilitating the national mine action programme in Thailand.

At the regional level, Thailand, with the assistance of the United States, hosted a regional workshop on mine action technologies for the Asia-Pacific region in March, to exchange experiences in mine action activities. In May of this year, Thailand, in cooperation with Canada, Australia and Japan, organized a regional seminar on landmines, which was attended by South-East Asian countries to promote greater mine awareness in the region and to explore further mine action activities in the future. Such activities should help encourage the participation of more countries in the Ottawa process.

At the global level, Thailand will host the Fifth Meeting of the States Parties to the Ottawa Convention from 15 to 19 September next year. In that connection, an advance team led by Ambassador Jean Lint of Belgium, President of the Fourth Meeting of States Parties to the Ottawa Convention, will be in Thailand later this month to make preparations in coordination with the Thai side to ensure the success of the Fifth Meeting of States Parties. The Meeting will provide an opportunity for States parties to, among other things, take stock of the progress made in mine action, exchange experiences in approaches to dealing with the landmine problem, examine the practical challenges faced by affected developing countries in dealing with the landmine problem and explore new avenues for international cooperation and assistance. I should like to take this opportunity to invite States parties and others to join us in Bangkok for that meeting, the first

ever to be held in Asia. I also wish to take this opportunity to thank The Honourable Bruce Scott of Australia for his kind words regarding Thailand's initiative on mine action.

Our national experience has shown that global partnerships involving donor States, affected developing States, international organizations and non-governmental organizations are necessary for affected developing States to have a fighting chance to tackle the multifaceted problem posed by anti-personnel mines. The call for affected developing countries to undertake greater national responsibility in resolving the landmine problem, therefore, should be accompanied by a commitment to greater international assistance for and cooperation with them. The need for such assistance is even greater for those affected developing countries that are concurrently experiencing extreme poverty and economic hardship.

Similar partnerships must be forged at the national level so that mine action becomes a truly national endeavour. Close cooperation between military units — which in many countries have the most expertise in mine clearance and other activities — civilian groups and local non-governmental organizations is a vital ingredient of a successful national effort. International support and assistance should take into account those different national approaches to dealing with the landmine issue and should be tailor-made, as appropriate, to the local situation.

Thailand thus intends to continue forging those vital partnerships, at the national, regional and global levels, to create a mine-free world and to generate adequate international cooperation and assistance to help achieve this common goal for humanity.

Mr. Son (Republic of Korea): At the outset, I would like to express my appreciation to the Secretary-General for his comprehensive report (A/57/430) on the progress made in this, the first year of implementation of the United Nations Mine Action Strategy for 2001-2005.

As indicated in the Secretary-General's report, the definable set of objectives laid out in the five-year Strategy has provided an effective framework for steadily achieving and monitoring progress in the field of mine action. Since the issue of mine action was adopted as an agenda item of the General Assembly in 1993, the efforts of the international community to tackle the problem have brought greater public and political awareness to the issues surrounding landmines. As a result, we have seen a decrease in the production and use of anti-personnel landmines, a de facto moratorium on the transfer of such weapons, the clearing of many mined areas and the destruction of millions of stockpiled landmines. Most important, in recent years there has been a significant decline in the number of mine-related casualties.

While this progress is laudable, we must not lose sight of all that is still to be achieved. Landmines continue to pose a deadly threat to innocent civilians in conflict and post-conflict areas, not only claiming lives, but also impeding socio-economic development, reconstruction efforts and humanitarian aid operations. In response, the five-year Strategy employs a comprehensive approach to coordinating progress toward the goals of mine awareness, emergency assistance, mine clearance and resource mobilization, which are essential to countering that threat.

Let me take a few moments to comment on some of the latest developments in mine action to which, among many other things, my delegation attaches particular importance.

First, recognizing that the comprehensive collection and management of information is essential for effective mine action, my delegation welcomes the new and expanded missions undertaken by the United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS) in conjunction with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and other agencies to assess the needs of mine-affected countries. We further commend the continued development and maintenance of the E-Mine information network and hope to see the integration of additional resources similar to the Stockpile Destruction Resource into the E-Mine network as it becomes the centre for mine-related information on the Internet.

Secondly, with regard to mine action emergency response, my delegation notes with satisfaction the development of the rapid response plan and the further integration of emergency capabilities into the existing mechanisms. Moreover, we are confident that the plan to address the need for threat monitoring and contingency planning, currently being developed for eventual incorporation into the rapid response plan, will bolster emergency response capabilities.

Thirdly, as highlighted in the Secretary-General's conclusions, efforts to build effective partnerships with international organizations, with a view to harmonizing their mine action activities with humanitarian and development efforts, are crucial to the success of the fight against landmines. Close cooperation among all stakeholders continues to be indispensable, not only in coordinating activities and sharing best practices but also in mobilizing resources. In that regard, my delegation would like to stress the importance of the central coordinating role of the United Nations in generating synergy among diverse actors. In particular, we fully support the efforts of UNMAS, which has served as the focal point for international mine action activities.

Mr. Laotegguelnodji (Chad), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The Republic of Korea is committed to the global effort to protect civilians from the scourge of landmines. Since 1997, the Korean Government has faithfully enforced an indefinite extension of its moratorium on the export of anti-personnel mines. Last year, my Government acceded to the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons and its Amended Protocol II. Furthermore, last September, in cooperation with North Korea, we undertook mine-clearing operations within the demilitarized zone of the Korean peninsula to reconnect the railways and roads whose use had been suspended between the South and the North for the past five decades.

In closing, the Republic of Korea recognizes that one of the prerequisites for effective action is a substantial resource base, and has thus provided support to various United-Nations-led mine assistance programmes. My Government has made annual contributions to the Voluntary Trust Fund for Assistance in Mine Action and remains an active participant in the Mine Action Support Group. We share the Secretary-General's view that the United Nations should secure sound funding to meet the growing requests from mine-affected countries. With that in mind, the Korean Government will continue to make due contributions to this noble cause.

Mr. Amer (Libyan Arab Jamahiriya) (*spoke in Arabic*): Today's debate in the General Assembly on assistance in mine action is another attempt to call the international community's attention to the danger of the landmines laid in more than 60 countries, which kill or permanently disable thousands of individuals, including women and children. Landmines also cause economic, social and environmental destruction in those countries, hindering their attempts to achieve sustainable development.

The report of the Secretary-General (A/57/430) emphasizes, first, the progress made in the implementation of the six strategic goals and related objectives included in the United Nations Mine Action Strategy for 2001-2005. As stated in the report, progress has been made in achieving these objectives in several areas. We welcome in particular the distinguished work that United Nations programmes and agencies have carried out in my country and the consultations and assistance they have provided to other States to enhance their efforts to end the human tragedy caused by these weapons. It is our hope that the United Nations and its agencies will continue their support for national efforts to clear land affected by these indiscriminate weapons, which kill innocent people and cause immeasurable pain and damage.

In his report, the Secretary-General says that among the goals for the coming period is the universalization and implementation of the Convention of the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production, and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction. My delegation recognizes this approach as an international milestone on the path to freeing humanity of this deadly scourge. Nonetheless, it has to be recognized that it will be difficult to achieve this goal unless the concerns expressed by Member States, including my own, are fully taken into consideration. Those States have expressed reservations on the Convention related to the protection of national security, especially that of countries that have no other means to protect their vast lands.

Moreover, the Convention ignores several important issues, such as the legal responsibility of the colonial countries that laid landmines in other countries. The principle of responsibility has been stressed by several international and regional organizations including the Group of 77 and China, meeting in Havana, and at the 1997 Harare meeting of the Foreign Ministers of the Organization of African Unity. Those organizations have underlined the moral responsibility of the countries that laid landmines during the Second World War and during their colonial wars, and have called on those countries to make a reasonable contribution from their military budgets, to

offer information, to help countries remove the mines and to assist mine victims. In the Final Document of the twelfth Summit of the countries of the Non-Aligned Movement, held in Durban in 1998, the heads of State or Government expressed their grave concern at the immeasurable human and material losses and harm to development plans that landmines have caused. They called on the countries that laid those mines to assume their responsibilities and help States by providing them with information and maps showing the location of the landmines and by providing technical assistance for clearing them, in addition to defraying the cost of clearing them and paying compensation for losses.

My country, Libya, has suffered and continues to suffer from the problem of landmines and other ordnance left from the Second World War. Reports of the United Nations and other organizations have stated that both Axis and allied forces laid millions of landmines and pieces of explosive ordnance in North Africa. These have killed or wounded thousands of innocent people and have permanently disabled many others, in addition to hindering efforts to combat desertification, build roads, exploit natural resources and reclaim land for agriculture.

More than fifty years have passed since the Second World War ended. There were victors and vanquished. Victorious and vanquished forces left our country, but the mines and the ordnance they planted remained, exploded from time to time by an innocent child at play or by a rural woman tending to her sheep or by a wandering aged person returning to his home or tent. The loss of a life or an eye, or arm or leg — these are tragedies that repeat themselves daily because the warring factions did not mark the locations of their mines, nor did they provide the Libyan authorities with maps and information that show the fields where these mines were planted. This makes it difficult to clear these mines.

When we were debating the issue during the previous session of this Assembly, my delegation mentioned the historical declaration by Libya and Italy in mid-1998, in which both countries agreed to cooperate in the clearance of landmines from Libyan territory, to provide medical treatment and compensation to those affected and to establish a joint fund for reconstruction of affected areas and a medical centre for treating those maimed by landmines. The Italian side has already begun implementing part of this declaration and we look forward to the implementation of the rest of the declaration's obligations. My delegation wants to emphasize this declaration as an excellent precedent, because it fulfils one of the primary issues of our foreign policy which we have expressed on several occasions. Today and from this forum we reiterate that we in Libya still hope that the two other countries that planted mines on Libyan territory during the Second World War, Germany and Britain, will emulate the Italian approach and conclude agreements with Libya to assist Libyan authorities in solving this problem and to compensate the Libyan people for the damages they suffered as a result of the planting of landmines more than five decades ago.

The large number of new and modern landmines that are still buried in many countries reminds us that the road ahead for the international community remains long and tedious until we can provide total protection for the innocent. Efforts made so far are encouraging. United Nations Member States need to renew their commitment to clear all the areas affected by mines. In this respect, my delegation believes it to be very important that some of the objectives of the United Nations five-year Mine Action Strategy, and any other strategies developed by the Organization, should be to deal with the reservations expressed by several Member States regarding the provisions of the Convention and to conclude an additional protocol to deal with aspects of security and with old and new landmines and their harm to man and property.

Mr. Fall (Senegal) (*spoke in French*): I am delighted to see my dear friend once again in the presidential seat just as I take the floor. On behalf of the delegation of Senegal, I wish to express gratitude to you for your wise initiative in having today's discussion focus on assistance in mine action. At the same time I convey congratulations to the Secretary-General on his highly relevant report which talks of clear progress in attaining the objectives of the United Nations Mine Action Strategy 2001-2005. This progress is shown in the great improvement in the Electronic Mine Information Network, the development of a rapid response plan to deal with emergency situations and the increased adaptation of international standards in the area of mine action.

The serious human and economic toll that has resulted from this terrible scourge shocks us and poses an ongoing challenge to the international community. When we look at the figures, which are nonetheless deemed to be optimistic, we are confronted with a

wrenching fact — there are between 60-70 million landmines buried in some 90 countries in the world, disabling someone every 22 minutes with an annual total of 26,000 people who are maimed. In addition to the serious physical and psychological damage caused, these devices kill innocent civilians, destroy the economies of many societies and threaten for the long term the security of areas where they proliferate. This is a grim picture in which, unfortunately, here too, Africa is the most affected continent.

Mr. Kofi Annan was right when he stated in April 1999:

> "From my experience in peacekeeping, I have seen first-hand the literally crippling effects of landmines and unexploded ordnance on people and communities alike. Not only do these abominable weapons lie buried in silence and in their millions, waiting to kill or maim innocent women and children; but the presence — or even the fear of the presence — of a single landmine can prevent the cultivation of an entire field, or rob a whole village of its livelihood, place yet another obstacle on a country's road to reconstruction and development."

So when they adopted the New Economic Partnership for Africa's Development, African leaders obviously did not lose sight of the crucial role of promoting peace and security on the continent through the relevant resolutions of the Organization for African Unity/African Union on the Conference on Security, Stability, Development and Cooperation in Africa and the anti-personnel mine problem, particularly since, in this new crusade or jihad for the progress of our people, all resources, particularly human resources, must be fully and effectively mobilized.

That is why, in consonance with what the United Nations is doing, Senegal would recall that all mine action must be part of this five-fold initiative which is so familiar: assistance and rehabilitation of victims, mine awareness and education on risk reduction, rendering effective areas secured, destruction of stockpiles and universalization of the campaign through the Ottawa Convention.

One of the top priorities for the international community is to provide high-quality assistance to the mine-disabled through the provision of medical and orthopaedic services. In order to help the disabled and their families, we must develop a proactive economic and social reintegration policy to provide them moral support and to enable them to escape the debilitating state of dependency, so that they can become, or resume being, active and dynamic agents of development in their region or their country.

Secondly, education — through the launching of robust anti-mine campaigns, for instance — remains crucial.

We should urge States to meet their international obligations — a point that was made earlier by Libya. They should be urged to continue and to redouble their efforts to finance awareness campaigns, to train local deminers and to promote civilian demining and so-called proximity demining, so that the decontamination of areas can be carried out from the perspective of promoting development for peoples in distress.

Individuals living in mine-infested areas should be provided with extensive information about the dangers posed by mines and consequently should adapt their behaviour to the new requirements of their area. This can be accomplished through the implementation of educational programmes on the prevention of mine accidents.

Equally important is the third aspect of mine action, in which priority is given to mine clearance and to making mine-infested environments more secure in countries emerging from conflict. This requires the full participation of donors and of beneficiaries. Let me cite as examples, in the region of the Economic Community of West African States, Sierra Leone, Guinea-Bissau and Liberia, which require special attention and assistance from the international community.

Together with the promoters of international campaigns to achieve a mine-free planet, Senegal endorses the following priorities: the integration by development partners of the scourge of "mine pollution" in their aid and cooperation policies; and the creation of a permanent fund for mine clearance, supported by mandatory contributions and aimed at financing community programmes.

Fourthly, there is a clear decline in the international production, sale and transfer of anti-personnel landmines, so the priorities here must include, now more than ever before, the systematic destruction of stockpiles as well as the mapping and marking of minefields, in keeping with new norms of international law emanating from the United Nations.

Given the fact that the number of stockpiled mines far exceeds the number of those actually laid, the United Nations is encouraged to step up its efforts to assist targeted countries by providing more effective management of stockpile-destruction programmes, which should be completed within the four years following the entry into force of the Convention — that is to say, in principle, before the deadline of 1 March 2003, which, unfortunately, appears to be nearly impossible to meet.

Last but not least, the fifth aspect of mine action involves the need to meet the primary challenge of the universalization of a ban, through the Ottawa process, that sets a new international standard against the use of mines. This legal norm should be adopted by all States, including those that have not yet acceded to the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction.

That Convention, which was signed on 3 December 1997 in Ottawa by some 144 States, entered into force on 1 March 1999 following ratification by Burkina Faso. Today it has been ratified by about 130 countries and has become a kind of reference point that should gradually be adopted by all States that are determined to abide by this new international standard, which is not an exhaustive one but does set an example. It is not sufficient, but it is important for more than one reason.

Because States parties are obliged to adopt national legislation and to submit period reports, the credibility of this legal instrument depends on the political will of States to comply without delay with the required confidence-building, transparency and control measures, which will require increased technical and financial assistance on the part of the donors.

Here we would stress the importance of the United Nations Mine Action Strategy for 2001-2005, which we believe should be viewed in the context of a larger strategy for peace-building and for the reconstruction of the social and economic infrastructures of the affected countries.

Senegal solemnly appeals to the international community to provide the necessary financial and technical assistance to the affected countries, in order to help them develop their national capacities to respond to the requirements of mine victims in terms of care, rehabilitation and socio-economic reintegration.

We encourage the World Health Organization, in cooperation with the relevant organizations, to fine-tune its intervention strategy in the affected areas and to propose that specific measures be mainstreamed into public-health policies not only for mine victims but for all communities living in areas affected by this deadly scourge.

Senegal welcomes the commitment made by Canada and the European Union to pool their efforts to increase global resources for demining activities, to set up an information centre on mine-clearance technologies and to create a global network to promote and make available mine-clearance technologies, particularly for African countries and their subregional organizations, at affordable prices.

That is why the momentum created by the Ottawa process must be maintained, strengthened and increased, because that process identified the clear link between the socio-economic, health and development aspects of mine action. This new standard must now stigmatize the significant number of States that take refuge behind contrived arguments to mask their reluctance to give up military and commercial practices that today have become totally unacceptable.

Speaking about recalcitrant States, Nobel Prize winner Jody Williams rightly stated with indignation:

> "It is time to put words into action. The civilian victims of landmines are tired of being told excuses. They are tired of being told that this nation has unique circumstances, that that nation has special security requirements. They are tired of being told that they must wait until this nation develops alternatives, or wait until that nation's neighbour has joined the ban. These are excuses, not justifications, and the excuses are costing lives and limbs every day."

In conclusion, I would like to share Senegal's vision of a world free from mines as a result of joint action, led and coordinated by the United Nations, among populations, States, development partners and the family of intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations, chief among them the International Committee of the Red Cross, the International Campaign to Ban Landmines and Handicap International.

There is a wise old saying in my country that man is the remedy for man. Let us ardently hope that, in regions that are still ravaged and torn apart by mines, we will soon see a new day dawn — a joyful day in which all can work together with determination and in harmony and peace for the full development of the great human brotherhood.

Ms. Costa (United States of America): The United States is a strong supporter of humanitarian mine action. We were among the sponsors of last year's resolution on assistance in mine action and look forward to negotiating this year's draft resolution with a view to sponsorship once again.

Since 1993, the United States has dedicated over $600 million to humanitarian mine action and will provide approximately $100 million more in 2003 to 43 countries. We are pleased that concerted effort by mine-affected countries, as well as donor Governments, international organizations, non-governmental organizations and civil society, has resulted in significant progress towards a mine-safe world.

Since 1988, when the United States first engaged in humanitarian demining in Afghanistan, we have expanded our humanitarian mine-action assistance to more than 40 countries. We are helping to demine the most dangerous minefields, train humanitarian deminers and provide medical assistance and vocational training to survivors of landmine incidents and their families. We are teaching children and their parents to identify and avoid the threat of landmines, and we are also conducting research and development into new technologies to detect and clear landmines more safely, quickly and efficiently.

The Leahy War Victims Fund of the Agency for International Development, together with the United States Department of Education and the Centers for Disease Control, are providing vocational, psychological and medical assistance, including prosthetic devices, for survivors of landmine accidents in a dozen countries. The Department of Defense performs research to identify new techniques for mine detection and clearance. Taken together with other donor Governments, these efforts have resulted in significant successes over the years.

The United States believes that we can most effectively help mine-affected countries by supporting sustainable, indigenous programmes. Thus we have established most of our programmes on a bilateral basis. We recognize the important role the United Nations system plays, however, in meeting this international challenge. We are proud of our work with the United Nations system to help achieve those results and we salute the leadership of the United Nations Mine Action Service, the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Children's Fund, the United Nations Office for Project Services and the World Health Organization in their vital contributions to a mine-safe world. We are also helping to strengthen mine-action centres abroad.

In order to accelerate the elimination of persistent landmines and to provide assistance to survivors of landmine accidents, the United States has forged more than 30 public-private partnerships to augment Government resources. Partnerships have added a dynamic element to mine action, and we have contributed our resources in a way that leverages private donor contributions. The Adopt-A-Minefield programme of the United Nations Association of the United States of America, for example, works with the United Nations and the United Nations Foundation to help demine Afghanistan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cambodia, Croatia, Mozambique and Viet Nam. To date, over $5 million has been raised and 100 minefields demined. Adopt-A-Minefield programmes have also been created in the United Kingdom, Canada and Sweden.

The United States is active in the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons, being a strong supporter of the Amended Protocol on mines and a proponent of expanding the scope of that Protocol to include anti-vehicle, as well as anti-personnel mines. The United States has destroyed more than 3.3 million of its own landmines and has had a transfer ban in place since 1993.

We are proud of these efforts and the progress that has resulted when Governments, international agencies and private groups work together towards a mine-safe world. The United States is committed to supporting public and private efforts for mine action and is grateful for the increased cooperation that has emerged over the past decade in tackling this tremendous problem. We owe our fellow human beings nothing less than the right to walk the earth in safety.

Ms. Saiga (Japan): It is important for us to work together to create a world free from the threat of landmines, and the Government of Japan has been

advocating a "zero-victim" initiative to this end. In pursuing our common goal in this area, Japan regards it as essential that a comprehensive approach be established, based on the two main strategies of realizing a universal and effective ban on landmines on the one hand and strengthening assistance in mine action, including mine clearance, mine awareness and victim assistance, on the other.

Allow me to take this opportunity to refer to some of the efforts the Government of Japan has been making in the field of mine action.

In order to achieve the common goal of zero victims, the Government of Japan pledged a financial contribution of 10 billion yen — approximately $90 million — for the five-year period beginning in 1998. By October this year, two months short of that five-year period, Japan had fulfilled its pledge and actually gone somewhat beyond the target figure. So far, it has provided assistance to 25 affected countries and areas — among them Cambodia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Angola, Mozambique and Nicaragua — to support their mine-action activities, which have involved mine clearance, victim assistance and mine-awareness education. And it has contributed approximately $17 million to the United Nations Trust Fund for Assistance in Mine Action, managed by the United Nations Mine Action Service. The forms that Japanese assistance has taken include providing mine-clearance equipment, dispatching experts to mine-affected countries and supporting the landmine-related work of non-governmental organizations through grants.

Here, let me focus on the assistance recently provided by Japan in Afghanistan as an example of our efforts. In January 2002, in the hope of helping to alleviate the plight of refugees and displaced persons in that country, the Government of Japan donated $19.2 million to United Nations organizations and other bodies for mine-action activities. In October this year, Japan decided to extend another grant of $4.8 million to the United Nations Development Programme, the Mine Action Centre for Afghanistan and the United Nations Office for Project Services for their mine-action projects in Afghanistan. It goes without saying that Japan spares no effort in victim assistance, including providing artificial limbs for landmine victims and supporting them through the process of rehabilitation and socio-economic reintegration. The Government of Japan sincerely hopes that these contributions will facilitate the long-term stability and development of Afghanistan.

While much has been achieved in the activities of the international community in the area of mine action, there are still a very large number of mines remaining and the total number of mine victims continues to increase. The Government of Japan is of the view that mine-action activities should be conducted as effectively and efficiently as possible to expedite the solution of this problem. For this purpose, it is desirable to take a systematic approach. It would be useful if the United Nations mine action-related agencies could develop a standardized system to monitor the progress of mine-action programmes and a mechanism to gather and disseminate information on lessons learned by mine-affected countries.

Japan also considers coordinated and concerted efforts by the international community to be very important. In this connection, Japan has recently been appointed to be co-Rapporteur, with Cambodia, of the Standing Committee on Mine Clearance, Mine Awareness and Mine Action Technologies in the Intersessional Work Programme of the Ottawa Convention. We hope to facilitate the discussion in this field and to further promote international cooperation in mine action.

In conclusion, the Government of Japan reaffirms its determination to work hard towards the solution of landmine problems in the hope that one day we will really achieve our goal of zero victims and that the people of the world will talk about landmines and the tragedies they caused as things of the past.

Mr. Hynes (Canada): 3 December will mark five years since the Ottawa Convention was opened for signature. In that time, great strides have been made in addressing the humanitarian challenges presented by the global landmines crisis. Vast tracts of mined land have been cleared; significant resources have been mobilized for assistance to victims; stockpiles of anti-personnel mines have been destroyed at impressive rates; transfers of these weapons have virtually ceased; and there has been a significant drop in global production and use of anti-personnel mines.

But more — much more — remains to be done. Demining efforts continue in more than 70 countries, with many others in need of similar programmes. More than 200 million mines remain in the stockpiles of more than 90 countries. This year, as we have heard

this morning, two United Nations Member States have engaged in large-scale mine-laying operations, while some others continued to use mines in smaller deployments. Fourteen States are still officially producers of these weapons. Against this background, victims of landmines numbered 15,000 to 20,000 last year.

So the urgent humanitarian imperative remains, as does the political imperative of securing ever-increasing and ultimately universal acceptance of the norms of the Ottawa Convention.

The United Nations has been an essential partner in the work undertaken to date and it has a crucial, central role in facing the challenges ahead. Last year at this time, the Assembly considered and endorsed a strategy that provided a comprehensive, detailed road map for setting directions and gauging progress in mine-action activities of the United Nations system over a five-year period. The report before us today documents an impressive record of achievement in the first year of implementing that plan. Of the 42 specific objectives contained in that strategy, fully 15 were targeted for completion in 2002. All of these have either been or are well on the way to being attained. Canada extends its appreciation and congratulations to the United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS), the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Children's Fund and all other partner agencies for the leadership and effectiveness they have demonstrated in mounting mine-action programmes in several complex emergencies, addressing mine-risk education and victim assistance needs and in assisting Governments and civil society to establish the requisite capacities to fulfil such tasks over the long term.

We have been particularly impressed with the efforts made by UNMAS and all relevant United Nations agencies to improve coordination and teamwork among themselves and with their governmental and non-governmental partners. We strongly encourage continued attention to this task. With significantly increased operational demands arising in such countries as Afghanistan and Angola, it is painfully evident that the humanitarian and development aims of mine action can be realized only if the international community pulls effectively together. Next year's review of the five-year strategy offers an important opportunity for further strengthening the coherence and the impact of our collective efforts.

Continued efforts are required in all regions, but I would like today to briefly mention the challenge in the most mine-affected continent of all — Africa. The security and development needs of Africa were a particular focus of this year's G8 summit in Kananaskis, Canada. At that meeting, G8 leaders conferred with African leaders and adopted a comprehensive plan of action for enhanced partnerships to promote stability and sustained development on the African continent. The Africa Action Plan included a specific commitment to assist African countries in eliminating and removing landmines, and we have now embarked on a process of consultations with G8 partners with a view to making good on that commitment. This process will include consultations with African partners, other major donors and international institutions, including the United Nations.

One key to ensuring progress — and this is a factor that has been mentioned this morning and applies in all regions — will be for the concerned African countries themselves to recognize and communicate clearly the crucial role that mine action must play as a priority in their overall development plans. They must also recognize that, beyond the individual human tragedy wrought by these indiscriminate weapons, their use and their presence in many situations presents a major obstacle to post-conflict recovery, peace and long-term development.

Finally, and in the same vein, Canada believes that it is crucial for the United Nations and its Member States to acknowledge the critical role that mine action has to play in advancing the Organization's broader purposes of peace, security and development in many parts of the world. One way in which that reality can be given concrete recognition is through the dedication of a more appropriate share of regular budget resources to core mine-action operations, such as those of the United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS), in order to reduce the undue reliance of essential overhead operations on voluntary funding.

Clearly, the international donor community bears and will continue to bear a major share of the responsibility for meeting the humanitarian and developmental challenges presented by anti-personnel mines. But that responsibility can be effectively discharged only in true partnership with mine-affected Governments, with relevant international institutions and with non-governmental actors. In closing, I should

like to reaffirm that Canada remains committed to full and active participation in this crucial undertaking.

Mr. Kirn (Slovenia): Slovenia associates itself with the statement made earlier by the representative of Denmark on behalf of the European Union. In addition, I should like to add a few points on behalf of my Government.

First of all, I should like to join previous speakers in commending the Secretary-General for his report on assistance in mine action (A/57/430). The report duly reflects the strategic goals and objectives in that area as well as the current situation on the ground with regard to their implementation. The mine-action strategy of the United Nations should remain transparent, straightforward and unsophisticated in order to match the very unsophisticated nature of the anti-personnel landmines that the strategy is essentially aimed at combating.

Next month, it will have been five years since the Ottawa Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production, and Transfer of Anti-personnel Mines and on Their Destruction (Mine Ban Convention) was adopted. States parties to that Convention have assumed obligations to destroy landmine stocks, to clear mine areas and to provide resources for mine awareness and victim assistance programmes. In addition to full implementation of those commitments, we must call for universalization of the Mine Ban Convention. Our deliberations today should echo and uphold the message contained in the mine-action strategy of the United Nations: a call for renewed political commitment to sustained mine action worldwide. Sustained efforts are needed, both on the part of States parties to the Ottawa Convention, to meet their obligations, and on the part of the international community, to ensure continued assistance, particularly to mine-affected countries, in meeting their obligations and commitments. Those efforts for global mine action may well be threatened if they are not supported by much-needed renewed and unequivocal political commitment, particularly to surmount donor fatigue with regard to mine clearance.

As stated in the report of the Secretary-General, important lessons in mine action can be learned where progress can be measured against clear objectives. Slovenia fully subscribes to that statement. By establishing the International Trust Fund for Demining and Mine Victims Assistance (ITF) four years ago, Slovenia set out clear objectives in the field of mine action: to remove the red dots — representing mine fields — on the map in the region of South-Eastern Europe and to assist mine victims. To date, 31.4 million square meters have been demined in South-Eastern Europe and close to 700 mine victims have been rehabilitated. Apart from its efficiency and transparency, among the ITF's most visible achievements are a low overhead cost of 3 per cent and a low demining cost per square metre of $1.70. That is why the ITF has also been successful in defying donor fatigue: it has succeeded in raising $102 million in four years. United States donations have made up half of that amount, and the European Union has also been an important donor, along with 24 other donor countries.

After its early success in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the ITF embraced a broader regional role in South-Eastern Europe that also encourages regional cooperation, which is of the utmost humanitarian importance and of political significance in the process of post-conflict rehabilitation. Thus, the ITF became a focal point of the South-Eastern Europe Mine Action Coordination Council, which also meets the objectives outlined in the mine-action strategy of the United Nations. That strategy, inter alia, highlights the importance of lessons learned in mine action. Slovenia believes that our future assistance and support with respect to mine action should also stem from lessons learned in implementing national and regional approaches. That is why the Slovenia-based ITF has also offered its expertise to countries in need outside the South-Eastern European region — namely, in the Caucasus.

In order to ensure sustainability in mine action, it would be worthwhile to provide an opportunity within the United Nations framework to share experiences and lessons learned thus far in the whole spectrum of mine action. We believe that that opportunity should also be provided in the context of the New York-based Mine Action Support Group, which Slovenia joined recently.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I now call on the representative of Israel, who wishes to speak in exercise of the right of reply. May I remind members that, in accordance with General Assembly decision 34/401, statements in exercise of the right of reply are limited to 10 minutes for the first intervention and to five minutes for the second, and should be made by delegations from their seats.

Mr. Shacham (Israel): I am taking the floor today in order to briefly clarify certain inaccuracies in the statement made today by the representative of Lebanon.

On 24 May 2000, Israeli forces completely withdrew from southern Lebanon, in full and confirmed compliance with United Nations Security Council resolution 425 (1978). Five days later, on 29 May, Israel Defence Forces liaison officers held a series of meetings with the senior command of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) and transferred detailed maps previously used by the Israel Defence Forces indicating the location in southern Lebanon of mine fields and areas suspected of containing mines and other explosive devices. That also included all information regarding mines or other explosive devices planted by other elements operating in the area. Upon receiving the Israeli maps and files, UNIFIL's senior command signed official confirmations of the transfer of that information.

As is widely known, southern Lebanon has served as a breeding ground for terrorist activities for many years in violation of international law, including Security Council resolution 1373 (2001). Throughout this period, large quantities of mines, booby traps and other devices have been laid by terrorist groups and by individual terrorists. Those mines and explosive devices have never been marked, mapped or reported, nor have the areas been fenced off in order to avoid civilian casualties. Today, those mines and booby traps continue to pose a serious threat to the population of southern Lebanon.

Pursuant to Security Council resolution 425 (1978), and in accordance with international law, it is the responsibility of the Government of Lebanon to establish effective control and authority in the area and restore international peace and security to southern Lebanon. Clearly, the failure to fulfil these responsibilities, with respect, inter alia, to minefields, endangers the civilian population in that area.

Israel remains willing to assist should any further clarifications be required with regard to the information it has transferred. Indeed, Israel's willingness to cooperate in mine clearance has already been demonstrated elsewhere in the world. During the years 1995 to 2001, Israel, in conjunction with the United Nations Children's Fund, conducted a mine awareness project in Angola that aimed to educate the local population as to the hazards of mines. Additionally, Israel conducted a joint mine clearance project with Jordan in the Aravah Valley in order to enable the agricultural utilization of that area. Similarly, Israel, Jordan, Canada and Norway joined in a project aimed at Jordan Valley mine clearance and medical rehabilitation for Jordanian mine victims.

Where there is goodwill and a willingness to cooperate, much good can be accomplished in the area of mine clearance. However, when these are absent, the result is a perpetuation of the threat to the well being of innocent civilians.

Mr. Assaf (Lebanon) (*spoke in Arabic*): The representative of Israel did not want this meeting to conclude without making more mischaracterizations. He said that I made inaccurate allegations in my statement. Mr. President, allow me to respond to the representative of Israel.

He has just raised a number of issues that I did not mention in my statement. In the discipline of logic, this is known as "anticipation". Instead of addressing the core issue, the representative of Israel jumped to other issues, thus creating a distraction from the main subject.

Regarding resolution 425 (1978) and the withdrawal from southern Lebanon, we describe Israel as "the lazy student" who fails in his academic performance and whose marks range between zero and one on a scale of twenty. He then might achieve a three out of twenty and claim as a result that he has scored a high mark. The level of the mark is relative to his previous performance.

Israel's withdrawal from Lebanon is not adequate. Israel has to fulfil many other decisions and to withdraw from the remaining areas of southern Lebanon. I will not go into more detail on this, but I need to respond briefly to the remarks made by the Israeli representative regarding mine action.

He said that Israeli Defence Forces liaison officers met on 29 May with the senior command of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) and that they handed to them "all information regarding mines". That is precisely what the Israeli representative said. I will not answer him in my own words. Instead, I will quote the Secretary-General, who said in paragraph 16 of his report, document S/2002/746, issued on 12 July 2002: "On 30 April, Israel handed over to UNIFIL

supplementary data on minefields in south Lebanon". I have just read the Secretary-General's words verbatim.

Mr. President, on 30 April 2002, Israel submitted information on "some" mines in southern Lebanon, not "all information regarding mines". The Israeli representative claims that, on 29 May, Israel transferred all information regarding landmines. In plain language, this is untruthful. This is imprecise language. I wish that the Israeli representative had checked and verified his facts before taking the floor.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I now call on the representative of Israel who wishes to speak a second time in exercise of the right of reply. Such statements should be limited to five minutes and be made by delegations from their seats.

Mr. Shacham (Israel): I am bewildered by the second Lebanese statement.

Two and a half years ago, a radical change occurred on the Israeli-Lebanese border. As I have already mentioned, Israel has withdrawn from Lebanon, fulfilling its responsibilities under resolution 425 (1978).

The Secretary-General confirmed this withdrawal in his report to the Security Council. The Security Council endorsed this report, and Security Council resolution 1310 (2000) was based on this new reality.

Why then does the representative of Lebanon continue to express his anger and frustration over the occupation of his country and the violation of its sovereignty as if nothing had happened? Could it be that these Lebanese sentiments have very little to do with Israel or its actions?

Israel has never harboured any aspirations towards Lebanese territory or its resources and has always taken action with the sole purpose of maintaining security along its northern border and providing for its own defence. Perhaps these Lebanese feelings could be explained by the fact that there is another State neighbouring Lebanon that occupies its soil and violates its sovereignty.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I now call on the representative of Lebanon who wishes to speak a second time in exercise of the right of reply. May I remind delegates that this second reply is limited to five minutes.

Mr. Assaf (Lebanon) (*spoke in Arabic*): As I indicated in my first intervention, this is not the subject under discussion. We did not say anything to prompt this Israeli reaction, because he has no sense of shame. I have just stated that he is lying. I have corroborated that by citing the Secretary-General's report. He stated falsehoods. Why did he not respond to my remarks? I raised those points, and he said that Israel had submitted "all" maps, while I stated that the Secretary-General himself admitted that Israel had not submitted all maps. Why did he not respond to that point? Why did he speak of other issues that are not under discussion at this meeting? As I have said, in the discipline of logic, that is known as "anticipation" — jumping ahead. His arguments are weak. He feels no shame about not stating the truth. The Israeli representative lacks decency. He should have remained silent.

Programme of work

The President in the Chair.

The President: I would like to inform members that document A/INF/57/3/Rev.2 containing a revised programme of work and schedule of meetings for the main part of the fifty-seventh session was issued this morning.

The meeting rose at 1.15 p.m.